

“Cutting the cord?”

Questions to ask if you’re considering dropping landline telephone service and relying exclusively on wireless

With many households now using both landline and wireless/cellular phones, a growing number of consumers are choosing to replace their traditional landline telephone services with wireless service.

The advantages and disadvantages of eliminating landline telephone service vary based on a consumer’s needs, concerns and location. Factors to consider include costs, wireless coverage at your home or business, and 911 coverage in your community. The Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor (OUCC) offers the following questions you should ask yourself if you are thinking about “cutting the cord.”

How often do I use my landline phone versus my wireless phone?

Save and compare your bills over several months to get a good baseline on your usage. Look also at the time of day you make your calls, and how much of the time you spend on the phone is used for local or long distance calls. Take landline and wireless usage by teenagers, children and frequent guests in the home into account, along with costs for Internet access and any other telecommunications services you use.

How much do I currently pay for telecommunications services?

Some households will save money simply by downsizing from two telephone service providers to one. However, keep in mind that wireless and landline services bill differently. Wireless services bill by the minute; while most plans include a set number of free or included minutes per month, rates for minutes above and beyond the free time can be costly. If cutting the cord is likely to lead to heavy usage of wireless minutes, be aware of how your charges may add up and be sure to choose the appropriate calling plan.

Do I use extra features on my landline?

Keep in mind that additional services (such as Caller ID, Voice Mail and Call Forwarding) generally cost extra on landline phones, but are usually included in the base rates for wireless services.

Do I use traditional dial-up or high-speed broadband service for Internet access?

If you use dial-up, you may benefit from having just one landline in your home for computer use. You can use a wireless phone while your computer is online, and you could still use the landline to call 911 in emergency situations if needed.

How concerned am I with privacy?

Wireless telephone numbers are not listed in phone books or available from directory assistance. Landline numbers are publicly available unless you pay to keep them unlisted. Privacy may or may not be a concern depending on a consumer’s situation, including business purposes.

How’s my coverage?

If you are thinking about dropping landline telephone service, test the wireless coverage on your property. When testing the phone, walk through every room in the house to make sure the phone has a strong signal and that you can hear – and be heard – clearly (though wireless phones are not likely to work well in basements). It is also a good idea to test the coverage from your yard and any other places from which you are likely to use the phone.

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What happens in an emergency?

If you call 911 from a traditional landline phone, the system is likely to automatically pinpoint your exact location - allowing police officers, firefighters or paramedics to be dispatched within seconds. This may or may not be possible if the call is made from a wireless phone, depending on your location and the degree to which local 911 technology has advanced (you can learn more at www.911coverage.org). If you are thinking of disconnecting your landline phone and relying entirely on wireless, contact your police and fire departments (at their NON-EMERGENCY numbers) and ask whether the local 911 call center can locate calls from wireless phones. You should also discuss this issue with your wireless service provider – both when choosing a plan and when choosing the phone itself.

While some consumers consider switching completely to wireless services, others have chosen to turn to Internet telephony (or Voice over Internet Protocol). Consumers considering Internet phone service should review the OUCC's "VoIP: High-Speed Internet Phone Calls" fact sheet for a list of the advantages and disadvantages.

In addition to thinking about the questions listed above, consumers who are looking for ways to reduce their bills for telephone service and other utility services (including electric, natural gas and water/wastewater) are encouraged to visit the OUCC's Website or call the agency's consumer services staff for helpful tips.

The Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor (OUCC) is the state agency representing the interests of utility consumers and the general public in matters related to the provision of utility services. The OUCC is active in proceedings before regulatory and legal bodies and is committed to giving consumers a voice in the creation of utility service policy.

OpenLines publications are produced by the OUCC to educate consumers on their rights and responsibilities regarding utility services. Fact sheets on many telecommunications and other utility topics are available free of charge. All OpenLines publications, including a comprehensive telecommunications consumer handbook, are available on the OUCC Web site or by calling the OUCC Consumer Services Staff.



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